Tat Tvam Asi

Self Realization

Measuring your progress – FIR method

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A Vedantic student traveling on path to self-knowledge may wonder whether he or she is actually making progress. Is there any way to measure oneself? Have I been able to translate self-knowledge into practice?

Swami Paramarthananda describes the FIR method:

- **F**requency of unhealthy reactions: There are times when I lose my mental balance while reacting to events in my life. I can measure how often I lose my cool. If I used to get upset once or twice a day, and now I have reduced it to once or twice a week, that is a good sign of progress.
- **I**ntensity of unhealthy reactions: Unhealthy reactions can express themselves in three ways: physically, in the body; verbally, in speech and mentally, in thoughts. In the worst case, my body is affected – I become violent, or my body starts shaking. My speech becomes emotional; I shout and yell. Mentally, my thoughts are uncontrolled, filled with extreme feelings. If I used to exhibit all three modes of reaction, and now I can control my physical body, then I'm making forward progress. If I restrict my reaction to just my thoughts without expressing it physically or verbally, that's even better.
- **R**ecovery period: How long does it take for me to recover from my reaction and achieve mental balance? It may take me a week to recover from an incident in the beginning. If I'm able to recover my mental peace in a couple of days, that's better. If I'm able to shrug it off in a few hours, that's even better.

Using these three Frequency, Intensity, Recovery period metrics, I can measure my own progress towards mental balance. A couple of points to keep in mind:

- What is the ultimate goal I should aim for? Should I aim to have zero reactions, without even any mental perturbances? Swami Paramarthananda mentions that even true *jnani* with full self knowledge may be annoyed occasionally and that it is unrealistic to aim for zero reactions. However, the reaction should be confined to my thoughts and I should be able to recover within a few seconds – say 15 or 30 seconds.
- This method should be used only to measure yourself, not to judge others! Don't tell your spouse that they not made any progress because they have not reduced their FIR!

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